

Message Text

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ACTION IO-13

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8876

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

USUN NEW YORK 561

PANCANAL

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 5878

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PORG, UN, PN

SUBJECT: COLOMBO: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

REF: PANAMA 5758

SUMMARY: PANAMA PUBLICIZED ITS CANAL "CAUSE" BEFORE NON-
ALIGNED NATIONS AND BEFORE DOMESTIC AUDIENCE AT COLOMBO NAM
SUMMIT. FROM EXPRESSION OF INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT GOP HOPES
TO EXERT PRESSURE ON U.S.; ON DOMESTIC SCENE GOP CALCULATES
IT MAY HAVE POLISHED UP ITS "REVOLUTIONARY" IMAGE, AND HENCE
PLACATED--FOR A TIME--SOME OF ITS NATIONALISTIC CRITICS.
FROM U.S. POINT OF VIEW PANAMA'S PERFORMANCE WAS A MODERATE
ONE, GIVEN COLOMBO CONTEXT, DESPITE INACCURATE AND ACERB
REMARKS CRITICAL OF AMERICANS IN THE CANAL ZONE. REAL
PROBLEMS OF THIS GOVERNMENT, I.E., TREATY NEGOTIATIONS
AND ECONOMY, NOT AFFECTED BY THE TRIP AND WILL CONTINUE TO
ASSERT THEMSELVES. END SUMMARY.

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1. WE HAVE NOT YET HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET A POST-MORTEM ON THE COLOMBO MEETING FROM BOYD OR THE OTHER PANAMANIAN DELEGATES. BUT IT IS NOT TOO EARLY TO MAKE OUR OWN TENTATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE WHYS AND WHEREFORES OF PANAMA'S BEHAVIOR THERE.

2. FIRST, TORRIJOS LAYS GREAT STORE BY THE INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT HE RECEIVES ON THE CANAL ISSUE ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE. HE BELIEVES THAT SUCH SHOWS OF SOLIDARITY--WHETHER IN THE UNGA, THE OAS, THE NAM OR ELSEWHERE--ARE AN EFFECTIVE MEANS OF APPLYING PRESSURE ON THE U.S. THEY ALSO PUT PANAMA (AND TORRIJOS) ON THE MAP AS LEADERS--ALBEIT MINOR ONES--AMONG THE "REVOLUTIONARY" MOVEMENTS OF THE THIRD WORLD.

3. PERHAPS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME IS THE DOMESTIC ANGLE OF THE COLOMBO TRIP. TO POLISH UP HIS POLITICAL FORTUNES, TORRIJOS NEEDS AN UPTURN IN THE ECONOMY AND SOME DISPLAY OF PROGRESS IN THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS. LACKING SUCH BREAD, HOWEVER, HE SETTLES FOR CRUCES. HIS PERFORMANCE IN COLOMBO WAS CLEARLY PLAYED FOR A HOME AUDIENCE. THE PANAMANIAN MEDIA DID THEIR PART TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE AUDIENCE GOT THE MESSAGE. TORRIJOS CLEARLY HOPES THAT A BIT OF BRAVADO HERE AND THERE WILL PLACATE HIS NATIONALISTS UNTIL HE CAN BRING HOME THE BREAD IN THE SHAPE OF PROGRESS ON THE TREATY.

4. PANAMA IS NOT WITHOUT ITS SKEPTICS, OF COURSE. EVEN BEFORE TORRIJOS LEFT, SOME RADIO COMMENTATORS WONDERED OUT LOUD WHETHER THE TRIP WAS WORTH THE FUSS. AND OTHER PANAMANIAN PRIVATELY NOTE THAT, AS FAR AS THE CANAL IS CONCERNED, COLOMBO IS JUST NOT WHERE THE ACTION IS. NEVERTHELESS, WHILE HARDLY A REAL COUP, TORRIJOS' TRIP SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN REASONABLY SUCCESSFUL IN DIVERTING THE ATTENTION OF SOME PANAMANIAN FROM THE BASIC PROBLEMS.

5. THE NAM DECLARATION'S LANGUAGE ON PANAMA STRIKES US AS A REPLAY OF PAST POSITIONS. CERTAINLY IT WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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MODERATE WHEN COMPARED WITH MUCH OF COLOMBO'S OUTPUT. IRONICALLY, THE PARAGRAPHS ADDED BY PANAMA (110-114) SEEM LESS BOTHERSOME THAN THE ORIGINAL ALGIERS LANGUAGE (PARA 118) WHICH STATES THAT U.S. BASES IN LATIN AMERICA, INCLUDING PANAMA, REPRESENT A THREAT TO THE PEACE AND SECURITY OF THE REGION.

6. WE HAVE ALREADY COMMENTED ON TORRIJOS' SPEECH

(REFTEL). IN IT HE WAVED THE BLOODY SHIRT OF '64 AND SAID A NUMBER OF THINGS WHICH WERE AT BEST UNFLATTERING TO UNCLE SAM AND, IN MORE THAN ONE INSTANCE, DOWNRIGHT UNTRUE. BUT HE STUCK WITH GENERALITIES, FOR THE MOST PART, AND STEERED AWAY FROM SUBSTANTIVE REFERENCES TO THE NEGOTIATIONS.

7. THUS TORRIJOS SEEMS TO HAVE ACHIEVED THE MINIMUM AIM OF HIS VISIT--REFURBISHING HIS CREDENTIALS WITH STUDENTS AND OTHER LEFTISTS AND NATIONALISTS WHOSE TOLERATION HE CONSIDERS ESSENTIAL. THIS WAS NOT WITHOUT COST, OF COURSE. ASSOCIATION WITH THE STRIDENT LEFT OF THE THIRD WORLD IS UNWELCOME TO MUCH OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND PERHAPS OTHER MODERATES. AND WE CAN EXPECT SOME OF HIS STATEMENTS TO BE USED AGAINST HIM IN THE U.S. CERTAINLY, HIS REFERENCE TO THE "ARROGANT AND AGGRESSIVE POLICE" IN THE ZONE, AS WELL AS SOME OTHER HEAVY-HANDED REMARKS DO LITTLE TO ENDEAR HIM TO AMERICANS WHO WORK WITH PANCANAL.

8. IN THE CONTEXT OF PANAMANIAN POLITICS, COLOMBO MEANS LITTLE. THE SITUATION HERE IS CALM, BUT IT IS A CALM OF FRUSTRATED ANTICIPATION. COLOMBO WAS A BRIEF DIVERTISSEMENT, BUT THE POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS HERE ARE ALREADY SETTling BACK INTO THE MOOD OF EXPECTATION FROM WHICH THE CONFERENCE BRIEFLY DISTRACTED THEM.

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